FELLOWSHIP IN

PRAYER

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BREAKTHROUGH

Cover Photo: "The Virgin of the Nativity", by Filippino Lippi, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Donald S. Klopfer, 1982.

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TO OUR READERS

Writers from a wide variety of traditions come together in this Christmas issue of Fellowship In Prayer with thoughts about the special "breakthrough" celebrated this month by Christians and the daily "breakthroughs" we all experience through the mysteries of insight, intuition, and creativity.

The issue begins with an eloquent article by John Walchars, S.J., who writes that the silence of Bethlehem can still break into our hearts and into our homes to turn agitation into peace. After this, Margaret Flagg alerts us with delightful wit to potential encounters with God amidst pots and pans. Her article recalls the famous New York monk who told a retreatant asking where God could be found to "go home and do the dishes". In "Release the Spirit," an extraordinarily lovely poem by Eileen Surles, R.C., lyrical trust is placed in the healing work of the Spirit at places of personal shatteredness. Therapist Anne Walsh juxtaposes some of her vibrant etchings with sayings of C. G. Jung to create a remarkable poetic essay on the inbreaking of unconsciousness into consciousness. Then, Jeb Stuart Magruder uses a series of heartwarming anecdotes to convince us that the meaning of Christmas lies in the gift-of-self that echoes God's self-gift in Christ. Emma McLaughlin evokes in a poem of gentle beauty the longing we all have felt for the light of a guiding star. Rusty Moe shares with us a vivid journal kept during a retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani to record the breaking-through of religious experience and new ideas. And Maureen Conroy, R.S.M., lifts us from intuitive depths to mystical heights as she contemplates the ineffable "heart" of God. The issue closes with "A Tranforming Experience," the new feature introduced in the August edition of "Fellowship In Prayer." The story comes from a prominent Quaker who followed an inner "leading" to found an unusually effective healing group.

It is traditional at F.I.P. to direct our December issue to our Christian readers, but this year we have selected a theme which we hope will appeal to all our readers. Breakthrough has many interpretations, and we hope that more than one of them will have meaning for you. For Christians, the greatest breakthrough of all will be commemorated on December 25, when God "crashes through" the barriers of space and time, as Meister Eckhart said, to enter history "once and for all." We need not be Christian to recognize that Christ's message, holiness, promises, gifts have stayed alive for 20 centures, as though they can not be edited out of God-woven history or the collective memory. We can all appreciate the magnitude of the Christ-event.

But there are other kinds of breakthroughs, large and small, that we all have undergone. Think of the creative act — not just a Chagall's, but one's own — the original sweater, garden, meal, or piece of furniture made alone. This work, like all creativity, lays bare not only the finest inner workings of the human soul, but also the dynamic ground of God the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth.

Another kind of breakthrough that many people report comes when we penetrate into the unknown world in a dream, a vision, an intuitive discovery. Think of Kekule, who deduced the structure of the benzol ring in a dream of dancing pairs; or St. Hildegard, who "received" her 77 songs — each complete and intact — in acoustical revelations that marked a turning point in 12th century musicology; or a personal dream that gave you guidance, solved a dilemma, or made a point.

Breakthrough has to do, also, with the birth of understanding, the ingredient missing at Reykjavik and the only hope we have of healing relationships at home or on a global scale. Like the flash given off when we strike a stone with a stone, understanding brings light and transforming power into the world, encouraging people understood to understand.

A medical researcher like Jonas Salk sees a breakthrough in the inrush of new knowledge that cures a disease. To people undergoing therapy, breakthrough may mean the point where the ego's defenses collapse, and a better, bigger self begins to appear. To Buddhists, it may signal the burst of insight that solves a koan; to Quakers, the clearness that ends confusion or indecision; to Jews, the Genesis miracle when God creates from nothing all that is.

There are many other ways to interpret our Christmas theme, and we hope that you will want to add your own to those mentioned here. The point of the theme and of this entire issue is to increase consciousness of the many opportunities we all are given to break *out* of the "ordinary" in daily life, and to let the "extraordinary" break *in.* Discontinuity can interrupt continuity, if we allow it to, and make us free.

It is our hope that in the approaching holiday season, you will experience the full power and mystery of breaking-through to the depths of reality, where the soul is flooded with grace, and the Spirit of God is trying to help us live.

MFG

THE STILLNESS OF BETHLEHEM

by John Walchars, S.J.

Followers of Freud believed in "the talking cure." But here a famous Austrian Jesuit shows how a moment of inner silence may be worth a thousand words. Father Walchars reiterates for the Age of Stress the timeless Christmas message of peace within and security in God: stillness creates an open space where the Word of God can live and natural healing can take place.

"For when peaceful stillness compassed everything and the night in its swift course was half spent, your all-powerful word from heaven's royal throne bounded, a fierce warrior, into the doomed land." (Wisdom 18:14-15)

At Bethlehem, wisdom foretold became wisdom palpably manifested. There, in that blessed town of Judea, the centuries of promise coalesced with the Divine. A child was born unnoticed to be accepted by the chosen few. Only an angelic hand could be appointed to unveil the truth, a happening beyond our fathoming yet within the ambit of faith.

It was a time of stillness, a time for the God of Stillness to converse with ineffable gestures. And ever since the silence of that night,

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The son of a Viennese labor leader and journalist, John Walchars, S.J. is one of the major voices in Roman Catholic spirituality today. A consummate philosopher and linguist, as well as a beloved retreat master, he studied and worked in Europe and China before coming to America. He has stated the purpose of his writing as "stemming the colossal permissiveness of our civilization, not by preaching, but by questioning the modern mind about the premises of its own formula for living." Among his books are **The Unfinished Mystery, Voices on Fire,** *and* **Resurrection of Values.**

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the silence of that incredible moment began to allay the turmoil which has become ours. The shepherds relished the advent of Bethlehem, and Bethlehem continues to beckon us. How can we respond to this invitation? Are we receptive to its special joy and peace? Do we need the serenity of that holy night or can we live without it? Shouldn't silence be enough to amend the ills of our modern times? Will "keeping quiet" help us to find the illusive peace which threatens to become the well-known stranger?

In silence, we temper our garrulous tongues to bring meaning to our speech; in stillness we rule the passions of our heart to direct discipline into our lives. Stillness drills deeply into our souls. The impact of stillness is best displayed where it is meant to grow, in

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The real in us is inclined to be silent; it is our acquired personality that is tempted to be talkative.

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our inner sanctum. The heart, thus tranquil, radiates the feeling of peace. Inner calm and quiet is the prelude to God's arrival through the many avenues of grace. Restlessness at the center of our being deadens the whispered message. A storm-battered soul is incapable of detecting and evaluating the glad tidings which are hovering outside. Tensions caused by others and self-induced conflicts undo the motivations of harmony and order. Unrest can beget only more of itself. "The fool has no love for reflection but only for airing his opinions." (Proverbs 18:2)

Eye and limb, tongue and brow can conspire easily to fashion a calm of convenience, but such a calm would not compare to the wondrous structure of stillness. Subdued nerves, especially when only skin deep, fail to promote the seed of contemplation. The ear receives the sound but it is the soul that interprets the message. Our intellect harmoniously knits together the abundance of thoughts and ideas whereas wisdom, the language of stillness, presides in fullness. Darkness is not eliminated by stillness, it is simply made more bearable! Inner harmony and peace are the best way to confront the inevitable assessments of life. The darkness which was threatened by King Herod faltered at Bethlehem and the holy three brought to Egypt their Christ, the King of Peace.

Stillness is at home in a soul which is unencumbered with attachments; it cannot tolerate being confined. To have an overbearing desire "to possess" or the urge "to accumulate" builds up a wall against yearnings to be "still". So long as we struggle anxiously to fill the silences of life with agitating noise and confusion, stillness will remain the stranger. The door is opened for the advent of the Divine as soon as "let go" prevails over "cleave and cling". When

we seek the "quiet zones of life" and perceive the inner voice of our outer deeds, responsibility and maturity are free to grow in strength. Unless given the blessed intervals where everything settles down and becomes quiet, the human existence revolts against itself and life becomes empty.

This does not suggest that with stillness we are sure to achieve a direct experience of God's presence and love.....God never yields to coercion. His coming-and-going is not to be determined by human means. It is our belief, however, that through stillness we will discover a certain nearness to God, a sense of security in God which insures a direction and meaning to life. Those who are "nowhere", usually go "nowhere"! "In the eyes of a fool, the way he goes is right, the wise man listens to advice." (Proverbs 12:15)

In most of us, there is a thirst in the soul for something more sublime, more majestic than ordinary events. Although driven to quench this thirst, we are apt to find ourselves at a loss of how to succeed. How fortunate that stillness, surrounded by the grandeur of the universe, can be depended upon to awaken feelings long dormant and breathe new life into the depths of our being. The beauty of a sunset, the vastness of the ocean and the expanse of the desert are natural phenomena God provides to nurture our need to be still. Who has not fled into a desert, real or imagined, in response to an undying search for God! "Your strength holds the mountains up; such is the power that wraps you; you calm the clamour of the ocean, the clamour of its waves." (Palms 65:6-7)

When stillness is in command, the soul reaches its peak of atten-

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We flee to our lips when we cannot bear the stillness of the heart.

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tion. The God experienced in knowledge becomes the God felt in love. Such an intimacy with the Divine is not expected to perfect our spirit....that is far from the truth....but this closeness with God stirs in us the conviction that God loves us as we are and not as we should be. And to this healing conviction, we gladly surrender without a battle. In spite of our inadequacies and futile ambitions, we rest secure in the mysterious unconditional love of God.

Those beyond the pale of Christianity yearn for stillness just as deeply as we do, perhaps even more. The Buddhist Monks, postured in silence before their hallowed shrines, implore their heavenly advocates to assist in the search for the greatest revelation.....inner stillness. Many of their earthly desires are eliminated in order to accelerate the discovery of their beatitude in the Nirvana. An anecdote from the Buddhist tradition tells us of a moment in time shared by two monks, Tanzan and Ekito. The two men, engaged in a pleasant

conversation while enjoying a long walk, were forced to turn back by a sudden rainfall. As they made their way carefully over the wet grounds, they saw a beautifully dressed young lady trying to cross the muddy road. Sympathizing with her predicament, Tanzan rushed over to the woman and carried her to the other side of the road. When he rejoined Ekito for their walk home, he noticed that his friend was speaking no longer. Ekito was still very quiet at the end of the day and Tansan decided to question the reason for silence. Ekito's answer was very direct. "You should not have carried that woman over the muddy road...you are a monk?" Tanzan's response was equally as direct. "Look", he said, "I carried the woman over the road and left her there. You, however, are still carrying her." The simple story ended with one last sentence: Ekito did not have inner stillness.

Why are so many of us prone to stuff our emotional knapsack with hurts long gone but secretly fostered? Offenses, real or imagined, are kept alive in wounded memory until an opportunity presents itself to even the score. Such an unforgiving attitude forces us to meet our tomorrows with ready burdens which weigh us down and undermine inner stillness. Christ, aware of the weaknesses which cloud the human mind, consistently warns us: "Don't be anxious, don't be troubled, fear not, leave revenge to your heavenly father." But who ever listens to warnings?

The practice of relying on WORDS to cure our ills can stifle the natural sequence of healing.

The challenge of inner stillness faces us all. How can we find it? Where should we go to discover its vestiges and its ways? Who will be our mentor? These questions imply that somehow we expect to find stillness in the outer periphery of life. We know, of course, that such an assumption is misleading. Stillness, a shy and elusive tenant of our soul, is born and led to growth in the ultimate recesses of our soul by our inner desires, by our inner hunger. It is ill at ease with the outer spectacle and possesses its own inner sources of fulfillment. The prestige of the world is meaningless. "Go into your rooms, my people, shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself a little while until the wrath has passed." Is. 26:20)

Stillness lends its graciousness to every scene; the way of life is never a barrier. Whether we serve on an executive board, perform on the broadway stage, the laborer's bench, or in the contemplative cell, every one of us must refresh our inner rhythm with the riches that only stillness can master. No one can abuse the inner strength without reaching the level of exhaustion. Eventually, all resources will vanish and leave us empty and fatigued. To know this perilous moment and to act against its arrival is a sign that we have already

learned the importance of inner calm and quiet.

Great events in religious history are often accompanied by the magic of stillness, not of words. The annunciation, the institution of the Eucharist and the death of our Lord on the cross are surrounded by a very meager amount of words. Few verbal expressions announced the most important events.

The real in us is inclined to be silent; it is our acquired personality that is tempted to be talkative. As long as speech informs, imparts knowledge or creates understanding, it is justified. When the words spoken are meaningless, however, they are sure to fail their mission. We flee to our lips when we cannot bear the stillness of the heart. And in much of our talking, thinking has hardly a chance. It is by our stillness or by our words that we are known. Some people remain silent because they have nothing to say; others remain still because they have too much to say. At the end of our journey when the Divine becomes the Judge, an account has to be rendered for every word spoken.

A host of physical and emotional ills is caused by sounds that are "sick". Anxieties and fears, increasingly difficult to avoid, are slowly becoming a part of our daily diet. And far too often, when we take these troubles to verbal analysis instead of to inner stillness, they turn into serious problems. The value of psychological analysis is as overrated as the value of power and money. The practice of relying on WORDS to cure our ills can stifle the natural sequence of healing whereas stillness, superbly equipped to solve many contradictions inherent in life, will provide the solution which human ingenuity is slow to discover.

"GOD WANDERS THROUGH THE POTS AND PANS"

by Margaret Fermoyle Flagg

Here images culled from Teresa of Avila, M. Scott Peck, and Gourmet Magazine are fired with Gaelic wit and Celtic charm. This incongruous combination of diversified ingredients results in a perfect blend, faithful to classical Christian wisdom and to modernity.

The summer of 1986 — known as the Season of the Great Rain — afforded time to ponder the magnificence of the mundane and the powerful blessing of unexpected joys. A request from **Fellowship in Prayer** to write an article concerning the theme of "Breakthroughs" was a joyous surprise but like the King in Saint Exupéry's **Little Prince**, I was without a subject. A kitchen in need of some order provided a spring-board for creative musing in the midst of polishing copper and re-arranging shelves.

While performing these perfunctory tasks, I remembered the principle so honored by my mother and so well articulated by a friend's father that states that "Order is the first law of the Universe." It was indeed — in the words of my students — an "awesome thought" to be in the process of enacting a fundamental precept which prevents a small segment of the Lord's Creation from crumbling chaos. The presence of the chaotic in our midst reminds us that like the Little Prince we must take precautions with our small planet. We need to clean our hearth fires and protect our be-Loved earth.

Sorting through a well-used collection of culinary magazines spanning the twelve years of our marriage brought to mind the gustatory transformation that has altered the American parochial palate. The ingredients of Nouvelle, Morrocan, Mandarin, Mexican as well as Basic French Cuisine occupy great space in spice-racks and refrigerators and have rendered Americans more aware of the enormous repertoire of possible combinations of the world's food. Our collection of *Gourmet* and *Bon Appétit* has been transformed from its spattered and disorganized state into testament to a wondrous ecumenism of the edible.

Margaret Fermoyle Flagg teaches in the Romance Languages Department at Boston College and is a member of the faculty at Ursuline Academy in Dedham, Ma. As a teacher of French and an officer in the Eire Society of Boston, she has a strong interest in things Celtic. Along with her husband Jeff, she has been involved in the process of religious instruction in St. Theresa's Parish, West Roxbury, Ma.

Co-existing with America's discovery of the exotic in gastronomy is a nostalgic return to "comfort foods." Writing in the August 1985 *Gourmet,* Laurie Colwin spoke of the need which the "sore in spirit" have for the uncomplicated sustenance of macaroni and cheese, beef tea, homemade soup, and custard. Their Proustian capacity to evoke past memories of a less harried time serves to temper our need for constant exploration of what is the current culinary new wave. Did not Julia Child proclaim that the quality of a restaurant can be judged by the masterful treatment given to the elemental procedure of roasting a chicken?

Scripture tells us that Jesus used the daily catch of fish and the day's bread as physical and spiritual sustenance for his flock. At the Last Supper, Jesus' choice of the traditional unlevened bread of Passover and local regional wines which would forever be the signs of His Real Presence within the Community of Believers rendered these simple fruits of the earth forever sacred. What began as customary fare became transformed in all manner of Being to the Food of greatest comfort.

A rare afternoon of July sun enticed me to forsake the kitchen for our hammock and a wondrous encounter with Dr. Scott Peck's **The Road Less Traveled.** Dr. Peck's insight into the phenomenon of serendipity provided the understanding that the greatest gifts of the Lord are not necessarily those after which we actively seek but those which He freely gives, often when least expected. He quotes Webster's definition of serendipity as "the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for." For him, the phenomenon of serendipity resides in Grace which is "a powerful force originating outside of human consciousness which nurtures the spiritual growth of human beings."

This Loving Grace "emanates out from the God within the center of man's being" so as to illuminate the darkness which our conscious processes do not penetrate. Grace resides in the collective unconscious and calls us to reverse the human tendency towards personal chaos and neurotic self-preoccupation so as to direct our energies upwards towards a loving God who wills growth and beauty for us His creatures. Dr. Peck believes that "mental disorders are disorders of consciousness" and illness occurs when "our conscious self resists our unconscious wisdom." That the serendipitous — the unforseen, unhoped for, miraculous event in our lives — often occurs at times of personal darkness indicates that our growth is "being assisted by a force other than our conscious will." God as the giver of Divine Presents is the source of the serendipitous.

If grace operates so as to save us from the pitfalls of our shadow self, it also serves to enlighten us as to the beauty of the unexpected in life. The great bearers of the serendipitous have been those persons whose presence has graced life with unforeseen moments of joy.

One such person is our friend Mimi who recently celebrated eighty years of distinguished service to the vast network of family and friends who hold her in deep esteem.

An unexpected invitation to an out-door feast at Mimi's gave evidence that humans need not be by nature or necessity territorial. Mimi's kitchen is common ground. There, pots and pans are entities to be shared and not barriers which prevent one cook access to another. When one considers that the kitchen represents for some women either the command outpost of their home or a center of negative communication, Mimi's decision to permit others into this domestic ground of being is one of heroism.

What is extraordinary in this decision is that the preparation of feasts chez Mimi is an open event for all those who venture to be present at their creation. Let all those who make salads, meatloaf or lemon meringue pies perform their task with gustatorial enthusiasm if not with total expertise. Cooks elbow each other in cheerful camaraderie, finding necesary culinary tools in places ranging from the obvious to the unexpected — a spatula near the spaghetti or tea bags in an antique match-tin. Those addicted to compulsive measurement find that a handful of pinch suffices. Creative improvisation reigns so that perfect spearmint leaf candies may serve as a superior finale to a meal and receive accolades worthy of a "Surprise de Vésuve."

Caloric content does not ultimately count at Mimi's table. What does is the real sense of communion with what is best within ourselves — our ability to joyously share in a common task — so as to put forth on table a meal which reminds us that Heaven might well be indeed an eternal feast in the company of the Lord and his friends. Her table has seen great friends of the Lord who have taken refuge at its gracious parameters and remembering their presence reminds us that Jesus called us to expansiveness and participation in his Spirit at times when a meal was shared with Him. Did not the disciples at Emmaus tell how they encountered Him in the breaking of the bread?

Such joys exist, for Mimi practices order as the first law of the universe and leaves space for the Serendipitous to create moments of great joy. Hers is a kitchen which tells us of holy ground, for it is the site of graceful acts of generosity — ones which witness to St. Theresa of Avila's dictum that "Dios anda entre pucheros" (God wanders through the pots and pans.)

REFLECTIONS

HOURS AND YEARS

English words are amazing.

English words are often chronicles in themselves.

You say the word, salary, and you think you're talking about money, as you are but the root of the word has to do with salt, and suddenly you are transported to the times when the thing a person wanted most was salt.

You say the word, principal, and suddenly you're talking a little Latin mixed with French. In Latin it's primo, meaning first, and then it gets a little nasal touch as it passes through French as primo becomes prince, the first of a group. And suddenly there is a link-up between the primary class of a school, the first-graders, and the principal of the school, the first person in importance.

You say the word, year, and you think of a 12-month period.

You say the word, hour, and you think of 60 minutes.

A year and an hour seem far removed in meaning.

Yes, they are now. But both the word, *hour,* and the word, *year,* have the same origins.

Both come from the same root.

They are cousins.

The original word meant a portion of time.

The linkage of these two words reminds us that what we do with our hours now determines what will happen to us in later years.

We must not think of our future in terms of years. Years don't happen. Hours do. And the years are the cumulative results of hours of work, or worry, or investment of patience and time and love.

So, although the two seem far apart, they are very close.

May what we decide to do in the next hour be a blessing to us and others in future years. May we do those things which are pleasasnt in the sight of Almighty God.

by Rabbi Samuel M. Silver

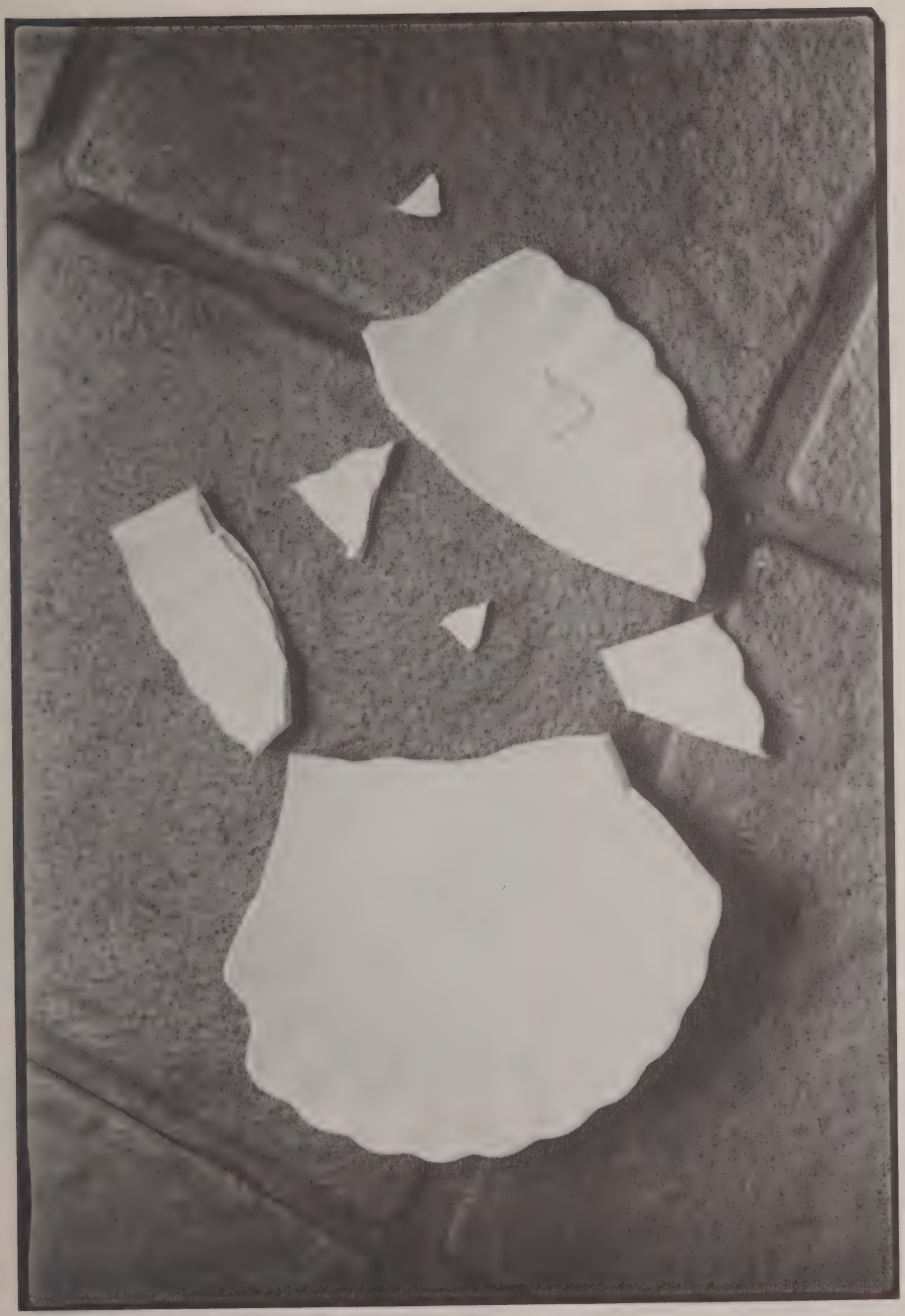
RELEASE THE SPIRIT

Spare not the fragile vessel sacred to the Lord,
Elect, cherished,
Filled to the brim with the Spirit's precious balm, but sealed,
Its living depths concealed,
Its perfume for the Lord alone.
No! Let it be broken on stone.

Release the Spirit! Let it flood the earth, outpoured
Where love has perished.
There is no other renaissance for what is slain.
Let fragrance rise from pain,
Till the mind be rapt and the heart made whole.
The Lord will gather the shattered bowl.

Eileen Surles, r.c.

Eileen Surles is a poet who has been a Religious of the Cenacle since 1941. A native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she has worked in a retreat ministry in Canada and New Zealand, as well as the United States, and has published her poetry in numerous journals and magazines. She is currently stationed in Chicago, where she is writing and serving as archivist for her order.



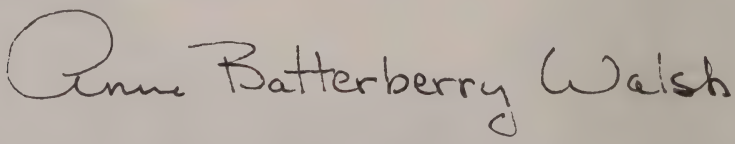
DREAM LADIES IN THE COMPANY OF WORDS FROM C. G. JUNG

by
Anne Batterberry Walsh

Every dream can be considered to be a message sent to stir us into recognizing who we really are. Symbols that break into consciousness through dreams, fantasies, or some other form come from the dark realms of the unconscious and show us our "missing parts"—aspects of ourselves of which we have been previously unaware. The symbol connects us to the suprapersonal forces at the source of our being. Symbolic images link us to the very wellspring of meaning. By paying attention to symbols a breakthrough can occur leading us out of narrow humdrumness and banality into a world rich with meaning. Although all symbols are connected with the universality of human experience, they are also intensely personal and can only be interpreted through each individual's personal story and situation. But interpretation, though helpful, is not altogether necessary for the symbol to bring a feeling of renewal and healing. Symbols do, however, require recognition, reflection, and room for play.

My Dream Ladies brought me a new source of energy a few years ago, when they first appeared in a dream. I tried to set them aside but they would appear in daytime fantasies, urging and nudging me into drawing them and later pushing me into doing colored etchings of their rather odd antics. By using Jung's technique of active imagination (i.e., giving full play to the symbolic image via writing, storytelling, dance, drawing, etc. to let it reveal its story or message) they appeared at the end of my etching needle onto the plate very much as you see them now. More recently, they prodded me into selecting some suitably poetic words of Jung to keep them company.

What follows is the result.



Anne Walsh is a Contributing Editor of "Fellowship In Prayer." In addition to writing and practicing psychotherapy, she does art work in a variety of media. The "Dream Ladies" accompanying her essay are full-color etchings and have been exhibited in the Princeton area.

...Within each one of us there is another whom we do not know....

...I can think only with wonder of the starry night sky, for the equivalent of the inner world can only be in the outer world, and just as I experience this world through the medium of the body, so I experience that of the other world through the medium of the soul.

The psyche reaches so far beyond the boundary line of consciousness that the latter could be easily compared to an island in the ocean. While the island is small and narrow, the ocean is immensely wide and deep and contains life which is far greater in every way than that of an island.

...From these all-uniting depths rises the dream....

...The dream is the small hidden door in the deepest and most intimate sanctum of the soul, which opens into that primeval cosmic night that was soul long before there was a conscious ego and will be soul far beyond what a conscious ego could ever reach....

...The unconscious is not a demonic monster but a thing of nature that is perfectly neutral ... it is dangerous only when our conscious attitude toward it becomes false.

...Dreams may give expression to ineleuctable truths, to philosophical pronouncements, illusions, wild fantasies, memories, plans, anticipations, irrational experiences, even telepathic visions, and heaven knows what else besides....

...The question may be formulated simply as: What is this dream's purpose? What should it effect?....

...The Dream Ladies, finally, have requested that this "essay" end with some lines from Wordsworth:

....."The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
but trailing clouds of glory do we come".....

THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

by
Jeb Stuart Magruder

For this Presbyterian pastor, the tradition of Christmas gifts has two meanings: God's self-giving in the person of Christ, and loving service to people less fortunate than ourselves. By faithfully helping others, he writes, we can all become "beautiful people," in the biblical sense of goodness and grace.

Luke 1:26-38

A couple of weeks ago, a friend of mine asked me when I was going to preach again, and I replied, "three days before Christmas." In a half-joking manner he said, "Well, last week you told us the meaning of truth, so I guess on the 22nd you're going to have to tell us the meaning of Christmas." I smiled and said, "Sure," but in the back of my mind I said, "That won't be very easy."

When you stop and think about Christmas, hundreds of images come to mind. And, for all of us these images are both positive and negative. My best memories of Christmas are as a child, and Christmas may be most enjoyed by children. Their minds are bulging with thoughts of toys, trees, lights and Santa Claus, the Christmas turkey, the Christmas pageant, the manger, the Christ child and Christmas carols with friends and family. Children have the advantage of enjoying the spectacle of Christmas without worrying much about the effort that goes into the planning of a meaningful Christmas.

For parents and other adults, Christmas may be a mixed blessing. Although most of us enjoy the effort that goes into Christmas, sometimes there are just too many problems associated with the season. How do I pay for all these gifts? How do I keep in touch with my friends at this busy time? How do I keep things in perspective for my children? What meaning is attached to all the gifts that we give and receive and what do they have to do with Christ's birth?

Jeb Magruder held various positions in business and national government before preparing for the ministry. Ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1981, he is now serving a large interdenominational congregation in Columbus, Ohio. He is the author of **An American Life: One Man's Road To Watergate** *and* **From Power To Peace.**

A pastor in Missouri tells this story to point up the modern dilemma:

> "Last November my choir director asked me if I would pick up the sheet music for 'It Came Upon a Midnight Clear". I happened to be in a shopping center the next day, so I went in a record store and asked the clerk, 'Do you carry any religious sheet music?' The clerk thought a moment and then said, 'I think some of the Christmas music might be religious.' "

For those of us who are older, Christmas can be a difficult season. For some, your children have moved away and can't be with you. For others of you, Christmas is not the same because a loved one has passed away, and for others, divorce has separated the family, making Christmas a lonely day.

So the modern Christmas scene can bring both joy and sadness along with the confusion about the meaning of Christmas. I liked the cartoon in the paper the other day that showed a weary lady shopper resting for a moment with her arms filled with packages. She is in the middle of a very busy department store filled with other shoppers and she is explaining the whole Christmas scene to her small son, as follows: "No one is quite sure how Christmas worked out like this, dear. Theologians are working very hard on that question right now."

And she is right! Every Christmas all of us are working hard to understand the Christmas scene. And even though the Christmas story is common to us it happened so long ago it often becomes difficult to understand in today's world.

In Luke's recounting of the angel Gabriel's being sent to Mary, we see the mystery of this miraculous birth unfold in front of us. For most of us Luke's account is etched in our memory. We all have heard it many times. Each year we see it retold in Christmas pageants in most churches throughout this country. In most cases it is a very somber scene! And at times for me it has not been very real.

So I was surprised and delighted when I picked up Barbara Robinson's re-telling of the Christmas story entitled, "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever". In her version of our scripture lesson, the characters who play the Biblical figures are not what we would expect. Ms. Robinson's Mary is played by a young girl named Imogene Herdman, and she describes Imogene this way:

> "The Herdmans were absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and used bad language and hit little kids and talked back to their teachers, and took the name of the Lord in vain, and set afire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken-down barn."

But one year Imogene and the other Herdman children showed up, for all the wrong reasons, of course, to take part in the annual

Jeb Stuart Magruder

Christmas pageant. They not only showed up, but took over. And Imogene played Mary, with dirty sneakers and cigar breath, yet holding tightly to her baby doll and defying anyone to lay a hand on her or her 'baby'. And the questions she asked: "Why did those smelly shepherds have to show up? And what were those kings doing? Were they really spies for King Herod?"

But something happened to Imogene, and the other Herdmans for that matter, in that pageant. Ms. Robinson believed that that year Mary was played with more feeling and reality than in a thousand over-pious Christmas pageants. Ms. Robinson put it:

> "...as far as I'm concerned, Mary is always going to look a lot like Imogene Herdman-sort of nervous and bewildered, but ready to clobber anyone who laid a hand on her baby."

Imogene, like the first Mary, had her questions. Mary, at the appearance of the angel, was troubled, and wondered what was going on, which, when you stop to think about it, is not a bad description of the ways in which we come to this Christmas season. We come with some experience of Christmas past, with some knowledge of what is going on, of the Christ child, of angels, of Mary and Joseph.

And yet...and yet are there not also some question lingering underneath our neatly cleaned coats and our last year's Christmas ties? Isn't there something in us that wants answers to our questions about what is really going on? Aren't there questions about who this Jesus really is? And if Jesus was God in the flesh, then why isn't the world in better shape than it is? And is it really true that there can be joy to the world when people are still as unpleasant to each other as they were in November? And is it true that love is really stronger than evil? Underneath the smiling faces and "Merry Christmases", aren't there some haunting, unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable questions?

Which is probably what the first Mary experienced too. Neil Hamilton, Professor of New Testament at Drew University, suggests that Mary, after she had had the visitation of the angel, at first acquisces. "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord." But then, she heads out, as fast as her feet can take her, to see her cousin Elizabeth is indeed pregnant, then what Mary heard wasn't crazy! Or as Dr. Hamilton put it, "Mary went to see Elizabeth to check things out because she had as much trouble with the idea of the virgin birth as we do!"

And so do we, when we are honest, check out our questions. We ask them of each other. We tend to think of our church as that six-month pregnant Elizabeth who will tell us that we aren't crazy for believing in a God of love in spite of the evidence to the contrary. We want and need each other to sing again the story of what happened and what happens still as we come with "our hopes and fears of all the years."

What we want is not always simple, rational answers so much as help in living with our questions and the mysteries of God. What we want is hope and courage to live through this Christmas season and the coming new year.

And that was the help Mary received—she was given the answer of a pregnant woman and then given the hope to carry on in her own pregnant state without the benefit of marriage, at least for a while.

What help can we receive that will help us carry on this Christmas season? What hope can we expect from the birth of the Christ child? Let me suggest two concepts that have helped me put Christmas in better perspective this past week as I was working on this sermon.

First, God really did change the world by sending His Son to be with us. This incarnation, as difficult as it is to believe, gives you and me an opportunity for new life. This opportunity presents itself to us on a daily basis as we learn more about God through Jesus Christ. This God/man is somebody we can relate to because He was human and had to deal with the same life and death issues that we face in our lives. But for us to benefit from Jesus' ministry, we have to take the leap of faith and accept Jesus as Lord.

There is a famous Christmas parable written over ten years ago by Louis Cassels, and spoken from this pulpit at least once a number of years ago by Bud Huntzicker, that helps us understand the incarnation.

> "There was this man, on Christmas Eve, who refused to go to church with his family because he simply saw no reason for God to come to this earth. So why celebrate something he didn't believe in?
>
> That night it snowed. As he was tending the fireplace, he heard a tremendous crash against his picture window, and he looked out to see that a small flock of birds had flown against the window in the midst of a blinding snow. The man went out to see how the birds were and, in his compassion, tried to get them to go into his barn where they could at least find shelter. He whistled, and he tried to drive the stunned birds into the barn, telling them of the warmth they would find there. But they were only frightened.
>
> As he finally gave up he thought, 'If only I could become one of them for a minute, I could lead them into the barn.' Just then the church bell could be heard in the distance, and just then the man understood why God had become man."

If new life through the incarnation is a gift from God, then the second concept we have to understand is what giving is all about. Mary became a beautiful person through the gift of her son. All of us can become beautiful people as we become givers. That is why helping

the less fortunate becomes a trademark of church activity...

Two weeks ago on a Monday night, I wandered down to Brownlee Hall after a meeting. It was late, but the light was on in the kitchen, and I saw someone hunched over the sink. So I went in and saw a Board member scrubbing a huge pot that only hours before had been filled with chili and used to serve the transients at the shelter. She could have left the pots there dirty for the custodial staff to do, but the light in her eyes told me this was part of giving of herself, and it wouldn't be complete until the pots were clean.

As I left the building with a light heart, I realized this was the same woman I had seen in the church kitchen the Friday before with other members mixing the ingredients together to make the chili. This example is not unique; hundreds of you spend countless hours on projects that help lighten the load for the less fortunate.

So Christmas has many meanings, and each one of us has countless ways to share in the joy of our Lord's birth. But the path can become confused, and often we don't know how to give, nor do we want to give. Fortunately, the gift is in the eye of the beholder, and we can become beautiful people in spite of ourselves.

This story by Nancy Dahlberg, called "The Gift", should help us understand that the meaning of Christmas is really very simple.

> "It was Sunday. Christmas Day. Our family spent the holidays in San Francisco with my husband's parents. But in order for us to be back at work on Monday, we found ourselves driving the 400 miles home to Los Angeles. It is normally an 8-hour drive, but with kids it can be a 14-hour endurance test. When we could stand it no longer, we stopped for lunch in King City.
>
> The restaurant was nearly empty. Everyone was busy eating, talking quietly, aware perhaps that we were all somehow out of place on this special day. My reverie was interrupted when I heard Erik, our 1-year-old, squeal with glee. He wriggled and giggled, and then I saw the source of his merriment. A tattered rag of a coat—worn-out baggy pants—a shirt that had ring-around-the-collar all over and a face like none other—hair uncombed—and a nose so varicose that it looked like the map of New York. 'Hi there, baby; hi there, big boy. I see ya, buster.' My husband and I exchanged a look that was a cross between 'What do we do?' and 'Poor devil.' Erik continued to laugh and answer, 'Hi. Hi there.' This old man was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby. Our meal came, and the dialogue between Erik and the old man continued. Nobody thought it was cute. The man was a drunk and a disturbance. I was embarrassed. My husband, Dennis, was humiliated. We ate in silence—all except Erik, who was running through his

repertoire for the admiring applause of a skid-row bum. Finally, I had enough. I turned the high chair. Erik screamed and clamored around to face his old buddy. Now I was really mad.

Dennis went to pay the check, imploring me to 'get Erik and meet me in the parking lot.' I trundled Erik out of the high chair and looked toward the exit. The old man sat poised and waiting, his chair directly between me and the door. 'Lord, just let me out of here before he speaks to me or Erik.'

It soon became obvious that both the Lord and Erik had other plans. As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back, waiting to sidestep him. As I did so, Erik leaned far over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby's 'pick me up' position. In a split second of balancing my baby and turning to counter his weight, I came eye-to-eye with the old man. The bum's eyes both asked and implored, "Would you let me hold your baby?' There was no need for me to answer since Erik propelled himself from my arms to the man's.

Suddenly a very old man and a very young baby consummated their love relationship. Erik laid his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder. The man's eyes closed, and I saw tears hover beneath his lashes. His aged hands full of grime, and pain, and hard labor—gently, so gently cradled my baby and stroked his back.

I stood awestruck. The old man rocked Erik in his arms for a moment, and then his eyes opened and set squarely on mine. He said in a firm, commanding voice, 'You take care of this baby.' Somehow I managed, 'I will,' from a throat that contained a stone.

He pried Erik from his chest—unwillingly, longingly—as though he was in pain. I held my arms open to receive my baby, and again the gentleman addressed me. 'God bless you, ma'am. You've given me my Christmas gift.' I said nothing more than a muttered thanks.

With Erik back in my arms, I ran for the car. Dennis wondered why I was crying and holding Erik so tightly and why I was saying, 'My God, oh God, forgive me.' "

Mary and Joseph, choir members and board members, Nancy and Erik and the skid row bum—all beautiful people, all God's children.

THERE ONCE WAS A STAR

by
Emma S. McLaughlin

Friend, where can I look for the one called Lord,
the infant of angel song?
The saviour that shepherds and kings adored?
I have journeyed far and long.

There once was a glorious star so bright
that darkness was turned to day;
then all men could follow the burning light
and kneel where the Christ Child lay.

Now heavenly bodies are blurred and dim,
earth's winds have power to sting.
I cannot abandon the search for Him;
I too have gifts for the King.

O stranger, before the long night is through
how wonderful it would be
if I could find Him in the guise of you—
if you could find Him in me.

Emma McLaughlin, a native of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, has been writing and publishing poetry since childhood. President of Keysner Poets and Corresponding Secretary of the Pennsylvania Poetry Society, she does poetry readings in schools, churches, and for civic organizations.

GETHSEMANI DIARY

by Rusty Moe

A reader records a series of fecund "breakthroughs" experienced this summer during a weekend retreat at the famed Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. Here the great Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, taught, wrote, and prayed.

**** FIRST DAY ****

pinned to the bulletin board downstairs is this neatly-typed note: "Important: A bull is running with our cow herd in the pasture on the opposite side of the highway, so it is inadvisable to walk through the area."...I want to soften, wind down, not push—retreat to the place that is dark within and feared—my own heart: the place that I protect that is most "me" and, for some reason, most unacceptable to me...I want to move lower, into the deeper light of darkness where God resides more thickly...God cannot be sought though...this I know: the very seeking after God creates a barrier, as though what I seek is separate from me...when I breathe and am aware of my breathing, I "find" God; in the urge that brought me to this place, among these men in their deep-dark brown and cream garb, I "find" God; in my experience of the sun-heated walls surrounding me, God is "found"...

two pinecones on the hillside next to the cemetery in the garden...pushed them together and jammed a white candle and a stick of incense into their stiff "petals"...the room smells sweet and woody...Merton in **Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander:** "God passes. God remains. We pass. In and out. God passes. We remain. We are nothing. We are everything. God is in us. God is gone from us. God is not there. We are here in God "...

**** SECOND DAY ****

after lunch (beef in gravy, creamed cabbage, a thin soup—which I didn't finish, and fruit cocktail), I went back outside with Basil Pennington's book, **O Holy Mountain!,** a journal he kept while he was in Greece on Mount Athos...found this sentence: "...strictly speaking, a retreat is a temporary thing—a stepping back for the moment, in order to be able to step forward with renewed vigor to fuller accomplishment."...a lissome rain fell on the four of us who were sitting beneath the widespread limbs of a tree...we are men wombed

---

Rusty Moe is Director of Counseling at The Hermitage, an ecumenical retreat center in Indianapolis. He took the photographs which accompany his journal during his stay at Gethsemani.

among men here, responding to the undiscovered from within a darkened seed of silence...

are my camera and books escapes?...they extend me, even if they are... reading from Max Picard's **The World of Silence** while listening to leaves brush against leaves or a monk's legs brush against the inside of his robe as he walks past, or feeling a bug no larger than the dot above an "i" walk among the hairs on my leg—is that odd?...shooting Queen Anne's lace and rusted doorbolts as I wander with my Yashica—is that an obstacle to present-centeredness?...by attaching myself to camera or book, do I dilute my raw awareness or enhance it?...freeze it or bring its flow more directly into myself than by merely walking?...I am nagged by something that says I am not being "pure" in my awareness when I'm seated in a chair in the enclosure, reading in the midst of natural, continual choreography or taking a picture of something that will never again exist as it does the moment I record its image on film...

many are lined up for confession...these doors are never locked, and the world steps through them, and the Trappists are here—steadying, staying, stabilizing...and we come in, moving through these buildings and through these monks like the bats flying soundlessly in the sanctuary...belonging...

back from a walk to the two statues that depict Peter, James, and John asleep in the garden of Gethsemani, while at a slight angle a little further on, Jesus is in his great agony...I came upon the second statue, surprised by the posture of Jesus: upright on his knees, head flung back, back arched, hands over his eyes, elbows V-ed to the sky...such a startlement in the midst of the serene and pitch-scented sanctuary, and what a contrast to the disciples' sensual repose...I looked on the simple lines of the black sculpture, at the outline of the heaving ribs beneath the drape of the robe, at the thrown-back head...this is history's moment of decision and surrender; God is allowed entry into the affairs of the spirit of humankind...in this dark garden is Jesus' "yes" spoken—not out of resignation, but from the apex of paradox...life, because of this death-yes, will forevermore be altered...

my picture-taking is very different this time than it was two years ago...then, I was much more the tourist; walking, climbing, capturing the exterior...this retreat, I'm concerned with details of the interior—of the toothbrush and floss and comb on the metal shelf above the sink; of the bed that's made out of a 5-inch slab of foam rubber and a piece of three-quarter inch plywood; of the icon high on the wall over the bed...this is the movement I've been sensing...odd that I consider this concealment of place, time, and interior as "movement"...

during a horrible supper of cold, creamed peas and a sandwich made of baloney and Trappist cheese (whose creamy texture is a ruse for its taste—which is quite like milk on the verge of curdling), I had this thought: God does not love, God **is** love; only that, can do nothing **but** that...this makes it safe for me to hold out my fearsome, dark heart to be bathed by That Light...

**** THIRD DAY ****

sun is out and shining, the air is still cool, and the birds are celebrating their own voices...today won't be as stultifying and sultry as yesterday...the bats flew through the sanctuary during the 6:15 Mass (theirs must be a special novitiate)...a difficult sleep last night, one in which I woke with a sudden wondering of "Who is it that's thinking—and knowing he's thinking?"...showering, I had an even greater sense of that awareness: what **is** it that brings me to this place? **who** is it that gives over to such an urge?...

walked to the top of the hill across the drive from the monastery, where the statue of Joseph stands high on its pedestal in the midst of weeds and flowering yucca plants...should have done it sooner...the view!...plowed fields like Zen gardens and looping hills hazed with the aura of the day's dying heat and aflame with the spice of earth's cycles...three crows circled in the east, one cawing to the other two, and across Highway 247, I saw the cow herd hoofing down the hill toward the edge of the blacktop...the bull was with them, black and loose-genitaled...this place exudes a geometry of timelessness...I walk among the well-tended dead as nonchalantly as I wander among the living, who carry nothing or a book or maybe coffee in a white cup... the bricks of the buildings, shabbied by the years, beckon with a welcome that's as fresh as their mortar once was, fresher...for a moment, sitting on the bench beneath Joseph, I am unrelated to anyone—family, friends, clients...detached—not sadly so, but factually...and then comes the familiar rondeau of thoughts: how is it that I come to be sitting on a hillside next to a monastery in Kentucky as the sun sets and a cow lows on the 28th day of June almost 90 years after my grandmother was born? what is it that I follow through these hills; that calls to me, without gesture or word?...beneath what I am seeing, far beneath the words I have written and read and the few I have spoken, and beneath the listening and the silence is a spiritual tinder that is responsible for my ignition...I have **place** in this realm of creation, as surely as do the bugs that have stung me and the humidity than has hung on me as I've read...alone—I have place...and proceeding from this place, I continue to be created...the ineffable God has been resident in every breath, step, and mouthful of food I've taken...there is no existence apart from that...none...

MEDITATION

A STORY OF GOD'S HEART

by Maureen Conroy, R.S.M.

CREATIVE HEART

"In the beginning . . . God created." (Gen. 1:1)
Heart breathing . . .
pulsating with love
penetrating through darkness
overflowing like a river
erupting earth
creating life
imaging Self
resting with contentment
"God looked at everything he had made,
and he found it very good." (Gen. 1:31)

WOUNDED HEART

"Woe is me! I am undone,
my wound is incurable." (Jer. 11:19)
Heart grieving . . .
yearning for the beloved
desolating pain
weeping fountains of tears
anguishing anger
waiting with weariness
mourning in darkness
longing for union
"I call you back
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
a wife married in youth and then cast off." (Is 54:6)

PURSUING HEART

"How can I give you up, O Ephraim!"
How shall I surrender you, O Israel." (Hos. 11:8)
Heart espousing . . .
searching eagerly
seeking with passion
promising a land overflowing
drawing with bands of love
alluring to a desert
speaking tenderly
ravishing with love
"I will espouse you to me forever;
I will espouse you in right and justice
in love and in mercy;
I will espouse you in fidelity,
and you shall know the Lord." (Hos. 2:21-22)

ENFLESHED HEART

"In the beginning was the Word;
the Word was in God's presence
and the Word was God." (Jn. 1:1)
Heart conceiving . . .
filling-full the promise
overshadowing with love
erupting into human life
leaping with joy
waiting in stillness
springing forth from a womb
birthing light into darkness
"The Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us." (Jn. 1:14)

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HEALING HEART

"I have come that you may have
life, and have it to the full." (Jn. 3:16)
Heart touching . . .
stretching out a hand
inviting into the kingdom feast
speaking the word of life
enabling the blind to see
enlivening dead bodies and broken spirits
changing stoney hearts into flesh
reaping a harvest of life
"From within me rivers of living water shall flow.
Whoever drinks the water I give
will never be thirsty;
The water I give shall become a fountain within
leaping up to provide life." (Jn. 7:38,14)

ACHING HEART

"How often I have yearned to gather you,
as a mother bird gathers her young
under her wings, but you refused me." (Mt. 23:37)
Heart weeping . . .
pleading with no response
languishing unrelentlessly in love
yearning to water dry land
longing to enflesh hearts of stone
hurting from rejecting hearts
drowning in tears of vulnerability
"This people pay me lip service
but their heart is far from me.
Empty is the reverence they do me
because they teach as dogmas
mere human precepts." (Mk. 7:6-7)

BREAKING HEART

"My heart is filled with sorrow
to the point of death." (Mark 14:34)
Heart agonizing . . .
anguishing in inconsolable agony
sweating drops of blood in torment
falling to the ground to be lifted up
stripping body of life to bring healing
bleeding to death to pour life into death
crying aloud in total surrender
"It is finished." (Jn. 19-30)

BURNING HEART

"Were not our hearts burning within us?" (Lk. 24:32)
Heart energizing . . .
overcoming death with new life
entering exultantly into glory
driving a forceful wind of fire
pouring the flaming Spirit on the earth
filling overflowingly with the Holy Spirit
encouraging all to grow in communion
challenging nations to live in peace
"Stir into flame the gift of God bestowed . . .
The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly
Spirit, but rather one that makes
us strong, loving, and wise." (2 Tim. 1:6-7)

"A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE"

We Learned to Trust Each Other:

by Louise Wilson

A Quaker recounts how a sudden inner leading led to the formation of a powerful prayer group that has brought new strength and healing to a dozen women, now trusting friends.

I was in the office when I heard a voice deep within myself say, "You must make yourself available to your own."

I began to tremble. But it was clear to me in a matter of moments what I had to do. I realized that I was being asked to do for Friends nearby what I had done over and over again across the country. It was time to form another healing group.

The insight did not stop my shaking, however. My husband was not in the office, so, sensing the need of companionship, I went to the office upstairs and asked a friend there to sit in the quiet with me. Gradually, my body eased into the stillness of God's presence.

I would have to ask the monthly Friends' Meeting if they would sponsor a group for the purpose of inner healing, and if they would like me to lead the group. Monthly Meeting approved my request, and it was announced after worship that the new group would gather on Monday evenings.

The day after that, during my morning prayer time, it was made clear to me that the group would need to be guided by a set of spiritual

---

Louise Wilson is well known for the many spiritual retreats and workshops on prayer and healing that she has given across the United States. She makes her home in Viriginia Beach, Virginia.

disciplines. I did know what those disciplines should be, so I was surprised to hear myself announce them that night. Our disciplines would be, first, required attendance at every meeting; second, daily practice of prayer and meditation, which would include prayer of intercession for each member of the group; third, Bible reading; and fourth, keeping a journal. I would not be willing to come each week and follow these practices unless everyone would be willing to do the same. Everyone was willing.

As I look back, I realize how right it was for us to hold one another accountable. Our commitment to these simple disciplines each day at home gave us a sense of freedom when we were together.

In a few weeks we began to trust ourselves and each other enough to share our hurts. One by one deep wounds were healed. As each one received, way opened to give. We became channels for God's healing Light and Love without ever seeking to be channels.

Almost from the beginning we prayed each day in our private devotions for several people: a baby who was born blind, a young man with cancer and a young women with deep depression. As the weeks passed we were praying for more people; some with broken marriages, some with memories that left images that caused great pain, and hurts of all kinds.

It seemed as though we were called individually and as a group to be intercessors. We lifted our minds and hearts up that we might know the mind of Christ and that we might know how to pray. And in our weakness, we have known His strength and have been present for many people.

Important to us as a group has been the fact that we are Christ-centered. Gradually we have all been bathed in the Spirit's light.

When we come together each week we have no agenda other than thanksgiving and prayer. Usually we start with silent worship. followed by sharing what has taken place during the week, on our personal spiritual journey and the ones for whom we pray. We bring forth the names of people we want to pray for as a group. Again we go into the silence. Sometimes we remain silent, sometimes there is a laying on of hands, sometimes there is spoken prayer or a calling out to the Lord with the authority given us by Jesus Christ. There is no time when one person takes over. We all seem to know that of ourselves we can do nothing. We lift to God a person or a situation, thanking God for the healing.

Even though I started the group in response to an inner leading, I feel that Jesus has been the leader and that He works through each of us. We have grown to trust Him and to trust each other as He speaks through us.

My heart rejoices and sings praises to the Lord! God is truly present for all who come unto Him.

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